

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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SUBURBS OF UTOPIA

by

Michael Sorkin

Exhibition Schedule: October 1-November 12, 1994

Opening Reception: Oct 1, 6-8 PM

Gallery Hours: Tues.-Sat. 11-6 PM

"Suburbs of Utopia" is the first solo-exhibition by Michael Sorkin, the principal of the Michael Sorkin Studio in New York City, a design practice devoted to projects at all scales with intentions ranging from the practical to the polemical. Current projects include proposals for the Brooklyn waterfront, a planning study of Greenwich Village and Tribeca, the design of an exhibition at the National Building Museum, a large installation project in Hamburg, and several building proposals for New York, Tokyo and Berlin.

Sorkin is currently professor of Urbanism and Director of the Institute of Urbanism at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and Visiting Professor of Architecture at Cooper Union. He is the author of numerous publications, including most recently, Variations On A Theme Park, an anthology on the modern American city, Local Code, a description of an ideal city imagined via a building code, and Exquisite Corpse, a collection of his essays on architecture. He was an architecture critic of the Village Voice for ten years.

Sorkin has participated in numerous exhibitions in the US and in Europe. His exhibition at Storefront will present a large body of Studio's most recent architectural projects, which will include the following:

Brooklyn Waterfront

A site along the Brooklyn waterfront, recently relinquished by the Port Authority, is the subject of Sorkin's proposal as an alternative to Olmsteadean paradigm for Battery Park city model, that turns every current urban waterfront into gentrified 80's type development. Sorkin's proposal is - given the likelihood that this will be an intensely trafficked place - to ratchet up the mix use. A conference center is maintained at the north, augmented by a hotel on a deconsecrated cruise ship. Below it, a large amphitheater facing the fabulous view of Manhattan. At the south end, he proposes an industrial use, a barge building yard. These barges will be both marketed and fitted out - as gardens, as sports ground, as restaurants, as community facilities - for use as constituents in the rest of the project. They might also be floated to other parts of the city to seed development of other stretches of the waterfront.

The remainder of the site is given over to an intense mix of uses, a kind of part-bazaar, suitable for use by very large numbers pursuing a great number of pleasures. The water's edge is treated amphibiously, dissolving into an archipelago of pier fragments, islands, walkways, barges, and marshes. The actual constituents of this portion of the park would be ever in flux, responding to tides, seasons, and the shifting desires of its users.

The Souks of Beirut

An entry for a recent competition, this project is a proposition for the rebuilding of the destroyed Souks which were at the heart of the city before the outbreak of civil war. It seeks to restore the atmosphere of the area without the literal restoration of its forms and to layer in new uses appropriate to a city on the verge of the 21st century. While rejecting literal historicism, the project nonetheless preserves all existing architecture on the site and systematically takes into account the memory of the architecture that preceded it.

The project - at a pivotal point between the historic area of the city and a new development zone- also seeks to knit itself into the larger texture of Beirut by establishing a new kind of "green Line." This sinewy, curving zone of density, pedestrianism, and greenery traverses the site - where it becomes an archipelago of garden- topped pavilions sheltering a large produce market- and spreads into the city beyond, propagating parks and adding its stitchery to the repair of a torn city.

Tokaj

Undertaken as a feasibility speculation, Tokaj is a project for a small new town near Budapest, Hungary. It expands upon an existing idea for a recreational development based on the construction of new facilities for the recently privatized Hungarian film industry. Tokaj augments this program until it assumes the proportions of a town, adding housing, commerce, recreation, schools and other facilities necessary to support a local community. It also adds another major use with long history in the region: a spa.

Tokaj, then, is a town dedicated to pleasure and health. Sporting thermal spa, hotels, medical facilities, casino, concert and theater center, parks, film studio and museums, it's both prototype and fantasy. Like Weed, it's careless and complex. However, though it is far more rigorously programmed, it attempts a kind of utopia of production and enjoyment, taking what might have been merely a theme park and elaborating it into the rich contingencies of urbanity.

Weed, AZ.

Weed, AZ. is a proposal for the urbanization of a site on the Colorado River presently occupied by the military north of Yuma, Arizona. The project investigates the consequences for the urban form of a city imagined in the light of new technologies of electronic adjacency, of benign forms of industrial production, of post-automotive transport strategies, and of an advanced view of urban sustainability.

The research embodied in this project (currently on exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles) is morphological, an inquiry into the new shape and character a city might assume given the freer styles of juxtaposition and configuration that these fundamental shifts in the nature of cities promise to liberate. Weed is not a universalizing proposition but a particular, local one. It finds its inspiration at the convergence of climate, landscape, culture, technology, and architecture, offering one solution to a problem posed many times over.

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